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# Who Should Get “Ineffective”? A Principal’s Ethical Dilemmas on Teacher Evaluation

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## Abstract

School principals play a critical role in evaluating teachers and providing feedback, but high-stakes evaluation policies at the local and state levels can create ethical dilemmas for principals. In this case, an underresourced rural school principal has to report a certain number of “ineffective” teachers to meet a requirement from the district teacher evaluation, even though the principal does not think any teacher in his school deserves to receive an “ineffective” rating. This study can be used to help students unpack issues of dilemmas coming from consequential accountability policies that overlook the relational ethos of educators and leaders in school practice.

**Keywords:** teacher evaluation, ethical dilemmas, principal leadership, accountability

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## Teaching Case Narrative

### ***Background***

Teacher evaluation was one of the major areas addressed by Race to the Top. To qualify for this optional grant program, U.S. states redesigned the procedures and consequences along with more rigorous and calculable indicators to meet federal requirements (Derrington & Campbell, 2018). Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) transferred a significant amount of authority back to states; states develop their own teacher evaluation system to better suit local needs, and districts are expected to follow the plans and meet their states' standards (Young et al., 2017). School principals who evaluate teachers play an important role in enacting the teacher evaluation policy and have to navigate dynamic processes in their school settings (Derrington & Campbell, 2018; Ingle et al., 2015).

This case shows the principal's dilemmas on teacher evaluation to understand difficulties school leaders encounter in dealing with high-stakes policy in Michigan. Beginning in the 2018–2019 school year, the state of Michigan mandated that four categories be used to rate teacher performance: highly effective, effective, minimally effective, or ineffective. According to the state policy, if a teacher is rated “ineffective” on three consecutive year-end evaluations, the district shall dismiss the teacher. When districts have to assign students for two or more consecutive years to teachers who received “ineffective” ratings in the same content area, parents must be notified in writing (Michigan Department of Education, 2019). This notification must provide parents with an explanation of why the district has been unable to meet the state requirement by July 15 preceding the beginning of the school year. Furthermore, from the 2019–2020 school year, 40% of the annual year-end teacher evaluation results need to be based on the students' growth and assessment data while the 2018–2019 school year mandates 25% of teacher evaluation results to be based on the student data (Michigan Department of Education, 2019).

This policy context can create ethical dilemmas for school principals who are responsible for evaluating teachers according to district and state policies that are punitive, while they are struggling to recruit and retain teachers, especially in rural districts. As Michigan

implements the Schools of Choice program<sup>1</sup> which allows districts to make decisions about whether or not to accept students from outside the district (Michigan Department of Education, 2013), many under-resourced schools face concerns that influence staffing decisions. Although the state policy provides clear guidelines for teacher evaluation based on established measures, principals' day-to-day practices bear tensions from both calculation-based accountability and relational obligations to others in their schools as communities (Head & Pryiomka, 2019; Kim, 2020). For example, this teacher evaluation policy led one school principal in a rural region of the state, Principal Johnson, to confront what he perceived as an ethical dilemma to meet teacher evaluation requirements at the district and state levels and still respond effectively to the desires of school stakeholders.

Leadership practice is an inherently value-laden and intricately ethical endeavor (Cranston et al., 2006; DeMatthews, 2016; Ehrich et al., 2015). While educational leaders can negotiate with multiple demands and navigate flexibility among rules and guidelines in enacting policies (Koyama, 2014; Tenuto et al., 2016), high-stakes accountability policy and its consequences also bound their ethical decision-making (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019). This can become overtly evident as school leaders, such as Principal Johnson in the following case, allow their moral dispositions and ethical understanding of complex situations to color their roles as educators and evaluators.

### **Context**

**The community.** Mountain Middle School was a grades 6 to 8 building located in a small farming community called Blue Hill in the state of Michigan. The school had strong community relations until 4 to 5 years ago. At that time, the majority of students had parents and family members who had attended school in the district as well. However, over the last 3 to 4 years, 15% of the families in Blue Hill left to start new businesses or work for other companies outside the area. Also, with increased support for school choice in Michigan, some parents in the Blue Hill community had elected to send their kids to the neighboring Greenville School District, a higher performing school near the state university. These new challenges were exacerbated by the district's tight budget, shrinking state support, and struggling local

economies. At that time, 55% of the students at Mountain Middle School were enrolled in the federal free/ reduced lunch program. Principal Johnson also found that 23% of their parents identified as relatively affluent. The more affluent parents were public officials working in county offices, health professionals at the nursing home near the school, or small business owners selling local products.

***The school.*** Mountain Middle School consisted of 15 staff members including the principal, one administrative support staff, a school counselor, a librarian/media specialist, and serves 158 students. Historically, the student population was predominantly white, but racial and linguistic diversity had increased over the previous five years, with a student body that was approximately 75% white, 12% Black, 10% Hispanic, and 3% Asian. Mountain Middle School had been struggling to recruit teachers and retain students. Due to the decreasing student population within the district, teacher salaries were no longer competitive with other districts. Although the local district accepted students living in areas contiguous with their intermediate school district (ISD), the local district's limited budget could not afford additional transportation services for these students.

***The principal.*** Principal Johnson was a first-year administrator at Mountain Middle School and has long been developing his skills as an instructional leader. Principal Johnson taught literacy for 15 years at the elementary and middle schools and worked as a literacy coach for 2 years in the neighbor district. As a veteran teacher and teacher leader, Principal Johnson wanted to make a bigger change by developing and supporting teachers to better meet the needs of students and communities. Johnson grew up in the rural town near Blue Hill, enjoying family-like relationships between school and his community. Witnessing rural schools in the areas struggling with teacher attrition, Johnson decided to devote himself to develop teacher leaders who can support local needs with strong instructional skills. Last year, he applied for his current position as building principal. Given his knowledge of the community and local culture, the interview with the superintendent and school board went well. They recognized in him a strong leader and viewed him as someone who would value their desire to build positive school-community relations.

**Table 1.** Mountain Middle Teachers.

<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Years at mountain</i>	<i>Teaching assignment</i>	<i>Tenure status</i>	<i>Prior evaluation rating</i>	<i>Total years of teaching</i>
Wilson	17 years	Mathematics	Tenured	Highly effective	20 years
Smith	1 year	Science	Pretenured	Ineffective	1 year
Baldwin	12 years	Language Arts	Tenured	Highly effective	15 years
Bass	15 years	Athletics/PE	Tenured	Highly effective	25 years
Avila	2 years	Spanish	Pretenured	Moderately effective	2 years
Robinette	1 year	Social Studies	Pretenured	Moderately effective	1 year
Dollins	14 years	Health/PE	Tenured	Highly effective	15 years
Larson	11 years	Science	Tenured	Highly effective	16 years
Turner	15 years	Mathematics	Tenured	Highly effective	15 years
Andrews	6 years	Social Studies & Technology	Tenured	Moderately effectively	18 years
Albright	15 years	Language Arts	Tenured	Highly effective	15 years

***The teachers.*** The teachers at Mountain Middle School could be divided into two groups—loyal long-term locals and newcomers. This was true of all of Blue Hill Schools, but at Mountain, due to the small size, it was even more pronounced (Table 1). Eight of teachers were veteran educators who have been working in the district for 15 to 25 years. They mostly grew up and were “townies” and, as a result of their years of service, had the security of tenure. The other three were recently hired nontenured teachers with 1 to 3-year teaching experience. Johnson realized that these young teachers were not overly content. One, Teacher Avila, had voiced concerns of having had her needs sidelined to those of veteran teaches, and another, Teacher Robinette, had confided to Principal Johnson that she often felt intimidated by certain experienced teachers. This latter individual wanted to leave teaching—to move to the nearby metropolitan area and pursue her graduate studies. But overall, Principal Johnson thought the school culture was stable based on teachers’ long-term relationships with each other. The veteran teachers had assured Johnson that they were more than willing to support novice teachers—when they were asked.

### ***Possibilities and Challenges in Teacher Development***

At the start of the school year, Principal Johnson completed a campus climate assessment. He found that the more recently hired teachers rarely asked for help from other teachers. They relied on pedagogical

knowledge attained from their preservice education, and they tended to seek external professional development (PD). By November, Principal Johnson had assigned official mentors to the three novice teachers—to support their growth and to foster more positive relations.

One mentor teacher, Wilson, had been teaching mathematics for 20 years within the district, with this being her 17th year at Mountain Middle. Principal Johnson saw that many high school students who graduated Mountain Middle School often came to see her or volunteered to help out in her classroom. Johnson perceived Teacher Wilson's teaching style as very "traditional," with students dictating while she lectures. However, she was good at storytelling, which helps students understand core elements of mathematics; and students enjoyed listening to her stories.

Her assigned mentee, Teacher Smith, was a novice science teacher who grew up in town and started teaching last year. Unlike his fellow novice teachers, Smith tended to ask for advice, not only for his classroom teaching, but also about developing relationships with students and parents. Last year, Teacher Smith had successfully organized and led the school musical fundraising event to support a student field trip. This year, Smith had been involved in many school-community events. Families in town welcomed Teacher Smith's return to Mountain Middle School as a teacher as one of their own. However, in terms of his instruction, Principal Johnson found that Teacher Smith needed to improve to be comparable to other teachers in his school. At the same time, Johnson believed that Teacher Smith had the potential to develop his instructional skills given his ability to incorporate critical discussions on environmental issues and student talk into his lessons.

### ***Teacher Evaluation: The New System***

Recently, the Blue Hill Schools had adopted Marzano's system for teacher evaluation. The superintendent had been clear with all principals about following the protocol. With Marzano's system, more than 90% of students in each class needed to show evidence of adaptation to the learning objectives to achieve a desired performance indicator of "highly effective." The district also set the online evaluation system so that only 30% of teachers can get evaluated as "highly effective" for the final results. There were 46 performance indicators based on

two formal observations. The criteria were to be consistently applied across all five schools in the district.

Personally, Principal Johnson felt the district's way of evaluating teachers was unreasonable. Even if a teacher tried wholeheartedly to enact all performance indicators, if 90% of the students did not implement adaptations, teachers could never achieve a rating of "highly effective." Also, reaching all indicators in the two formal observations did not necessarily indicate an authentic performance evaluation. Although informal observations and walk-throughs provided an opportunity to gauge performance, Principal Johnson elected to not evaluate during informal visits out of respect to teachers' pedagogic creativity and subject expertise. Johnson also knew that marking only 30% or less of teachers as "highly effective" would negatively impact school climate, especially for teachers accustomed to getting the highest rating.

Between December and March, Principal Johnson completed at least one classroom observation for each teacher. Johnson set up individual meetings with teachers to provide specific feedback on their instruction and advice on how to improve elements for which they received relatively lower ratings. In reviewing teacher evaluation results from the previous year, Johnson learned that Principal Sparrow, his predecessor, did not provide specific written feedback for areas of development. Teacher evaluation results from last year revealed that veteran teachers earned "highly effective" across performance indicators. Principal Sparrow had protected loyal teachers with lower test scores (25% of their evaluation in Michigan in the previous year) by inflating their effectiveness in other domains. Contrarily, all novice teachers under Sparrow had received a lower overall rating of "moderately effective" or "ineffective" regardless of their students' performance on state tests. As a result, Principal Johnson discovered these findings did not match with his own data from observations. When Johnson asked Teacher Wilson about this, Wilson informed, "Principal Sparrow was fine with what we do in terms of instruction. Sparrow did not spend much time in our classrooms last year, being busy with his retirement plans." This explained why teachers at Mountain Middle School tended to be defensive about teacher evaluation policy and his feedback.



### ***Ethical Dilemmas and Evaluation Data***

In April, as the school year drew slowly toward an end, Principal Johnson was busy with finalizing evaluations and preparing for summative conferences. One of his concerns was about Teacher Smith. Smith had received an “ineffective” teacher evaluation rating from Principal Sparrow. While observing Teacher Smith’s class through informal visits and formal observations, Johnson found that Smith did need to improve. However, Mr. Johnson believed that Teacher Smith had the potential to develop his strengths. Smith had a great teaching philosophy and desired to promote critical discussions on environmental issues and student talk in his class. Principal Johnson provided him with substantial support, which had helped Mr. Smith slowly begin to develop his pedagogical skills. Johnson believed that, like students, every teacher should have their own pace of development, and it was difficult to expect a novice teacher to perform at the level of an experienced veteran. Teacher Smith was willing to attend PD opportunities outside of his district, but the district lacked funds to support externally initiated teacher PD and subsidize substitutes.

In May, Principal Johnson received an email from the superintendent notifying that each school needs to report “a certain percentage of teachers” who will receive an “ineffective” rating for the year-end teacher evaluation results. This was intended to inform the district’s personnel reduction decisions. Principal Johnson faced the dilemma of reporting Teacher Smith’s evaluation because he knew that Mountain Middle School had difficulties recruiting science teachers for Smith’s position. Four previous science teachers quit within 2 years due to opportunities for other jobs in larger towns, and Smith was one of only a very few who had a certification in science to apply. Moreover, Teacher Smith had shown promise as evidenced by engaging students and involving them in class discussions. In addition, Principal Johnson knew that students’ growth in science had been stabling this year, not showing much gain from last year on the state-level standardized test but not dropping. Most experienced teachers used a lot of test prep—“drill and skill”—in their instruction; however, during the school’s data meeting in the fall, Teacher Smith had said that he did not want to do test prep because he believed that teaching to the test was not effective. Principal Johnson agreed with him. He thought that Smith’s

discussion-based approach was important in science and that developing critical thinking skills was the way students learn about scientific reasoning and real-world problems.

But being put in a situation where he was not only allotted a percentage of “highly effective” Principal Johnson now had been mandated to meet a quota for “ineffectives.” Before finalizing the results of teacher evaluations, Mr. Johnson decided to put in a call to a close friend, Ms. Pearson, who is a school principal in another state.

Principal Pearson: “That is tough. I totally get it where you are. I had similar pressures from my district before. As I did, you can just be honest with your evaluation based on your data from your formal and informal observations and discussions.”

Principal Johnson: “I get it. And then it will eventually result in an ‘ineffective’ rating for Teacher Smith. I’ll have to write a letter to our parents saying that their devoted science teacher, who grew up in this town, has been ineffective for two consecutive years and we cannot replace him. That’s not good news for our community. Some parents might leave. Honestly, I think he just needs time to grow. He just became a teacher and the metrics want me to treat him the same as teachers who have been here for 20 years! I still remember all the rookie mistakes I made and how it took time for me to develop as a teacher. And if we replace him, we will lose possible gains coming soon from what we’ve already invested in for two years! Recruiting a new teacher has its own costs and mentorship he has received for two years will be gone.”

Principal Pearson: “Yes, I think it’s unfair too. I’m frustrated with the metrics treating my kindergarten the same as 6th grade teachers in terms of their classroom delivery. Early childhood has different needs, but we use the same criteria of ‘students are self-motivated’ regardless of grade levels.

Principal Johnson: “Absolutely! The criteria do not allow you to reflect your judgment as an instructional leader. I would rather offer feedback and resources to help them, instead of checking 46 boxes.”

Principal Pearson: “As something to consider, you could assign ‘ineffective’ to a teacher who is going to retire soon.”

Principal Johnson: “There is one math teacher planning to retire, but that teacher’s been teaching for 20 years. This teacher isn’t what I’d call innovative, but her students understand math concepts *very well*. And her test scores are consistently very high.”

Principal Pearson: “Here testing is only 20% of a teacher’s evaluation. I forgot, you have to count much more, don’t you?”

Principal Johnson: “Yes, in Michigan, the student growth and assessment data counts as 40% of the year-end evaluation. But more importantly, kids and parents love her. High school students come visit her. Former students tell me she really prepared them for high school math. And she *cares* about them. I don’t think she deserves to get ‘ineffective’ just because this is her last year. I really want her to retire with honor and pride. Teaching for 20 years has been her life! Besides . . . don’t forget here in Michigan we have collective bargaining too. Not sure that would go over so well given her tenure.”

### Teaching Notes

In this case, Blue Hill School district in Michigan took a prescriptive approach to teacher evaluation and the metrics of reporting evaluation results. The district’s financial difficulties added layers that at least one principal, Johnson, thought were questionable. Considering the high stakes for teachers and students, he was concerned that his actions could potentially end in an unnecessary dismissal of a young teacher. Thus, Principal Johnson faced the dilemma of deciding who should receive an “ineffective” evaluation rating.

### ***Forces Behind High-Stakes Accountability: Market, Managerialism, and Performativity***

To understand underlying forces that create consequence-based, high-stakes accountability teacher evaluation, applying the concept of new forms of control—*market*, *management*, and *performativity*—is useful (Ball, 2003, 2017; Carpenter, 2019). Under the market controls, educators and leaders are viewed as consumers, producers, and entrepreneurs rather than servants of the school relying on economic values, such as competition, incomes, and interests (Ball, 2017; Scott, 1996). The *management* as a form of control constructs a mind-set focusing on outputs rather than inputs and efficiency-oriented approaches (Ball, 2003; Carpenter, 2019). The influence of management wears away the professional-ethic regime in schools and inserts the entrepreneurial- competitive regime with corporate culture in which schools and educators are expected to be innovative, self-managing, proactive (Gillies, 2011). The performativity has established norms that suggest only observable performance in the data charts or metrics should be counted as achievement (Ball, 2017).

In the context of Blue Hill, school choice policy in Michigan enabled market principles to function actively in the school sector, and this resulted in schools and districts being competitive on recruitment of students and teachers. The Blue Hill community's economic decline influenced Mountain Middle School and the district becoming less competitive than schools in affluent neighbor districts, which exacerbated the district's financial status and developing and retaining teachers. This market force intertwined with management, efficiency-oriented assumptions, and performativity-based mechanisms of the teacher evaluation policy in Blue Hill. For example, "ineffective" teachers will be announced to the parents and facing the risk of job security and teachers' effectiveness are measured through externally developed, fixed metrics that count only observable performance. This approach deteriorated professionalism in that Principal Johnson and his teachers did not have opportunities to offer their professional opinions in developing methods and procedures of teacher evaluation. Finally, for more efficient management, the district used the teacher evaluation policy as a tool to justify their future dismissal decisions.

Blue Hill is an example of the broader landscape of American school systems in which market forces, efficiency, and performance-oriented approaches have been prioritized along with education policies (Carpenter, 2019; Head & Pryiomka, 2019; Ingle et al., 2015). Henig (2009) argued that this trend actually led to the end of “educational exceptionalism—the existence of education as a distinct and semi-autonomous decision-making arena” (p. 126). In its place, general-purpose government and politics became central in education (Henig, 2009). Carpenter’s (2019) analysis of the U.S. education policies over the past 40 years echoes this, finding the purposes of educational policy have been linked to economic discourses to be competitive in the global marketplace.

### ***The Tensions of Tenure***

The prescriptive, consequence-based teacher evaluation in this case does not give the principal space to exert professional discretion informed by his school contexts. As an underresourced rural school with budget restraints, Mountain Middle School struggled to recruit and retain teachers. As a result, the instructional leader, Principal Johnson has to consider multiple factors such as relationships with teachers, teacher development, the needs of school and community, and policy mandates when he reports teacher evaluation results. The district’s punitive approach for the use of teacher evaluation conflicted with the principal’s intentions to help teachers grow through feedback. Such tensions from consequential accountability often result in dilemmas for school principals in making decisions. One of the major restraints that Principal Johnson must face concerns tenure.

Provisions of collective bargaining add a taken-for-granted nuance regarding the dilemmas that the principals facing in the practice of teacher evaluation. In particular, the provisions relating to a teacher’s collective bargaining agreement can add a number of limitations in how instructional leaders engage in teacher evaluation. In a study related to teacher evaluation in Ohio, Ingle et al. (2015) demonstrated that variations in collective bargaining provisions can exist even across a single state regardless of mandated state policies. However, the primary concern in this case involves the findings that collective bargaining tensions have caused a tendency in principals to focus

their attention on pretenured teachers rather than tenured contracts. Accountability policies are intended to assure that instructional oversight is applied to all teachers equally regardless of tenure status, and to ensure goals of PD, improvement of instruction, and ultimately student achievement. However, consequently, this results in yet another tension for ethical school administrators—the tension to find a balance between being a democratic decision maker and the sole teacher evaluator. As Ingle and Clark Lindle (2019) have eloquently stated,

[T]he inspectional, bureaucratic form of supervision in practice has shown impressive tenacity in spite of concerted efforts over the years to restyle it as collaboration between teachers and school leaders. Teacher evaluation remains entwined with supervision, largely sustained bureaucratically within the purview of principals . . . As a result, many teachers, especially pre-tenured ones, view educational supervision tenuously, hope for supportive critical feedback and professional conversations about teaching, but fear the worst—not having their contract renewed. (p. 31)

All educators, pretenured and tenured alike, can see instructional leadership as a bit of a nebulous lens. As a result, this type of fear can lead to a lack of trust and meaningful communication between school leaders and the teacher (Ingle & Clark Lindle, 2019). Teachers want supportive and constructive feedback about their teaching, but also the desire to improve can be laden with anxiety—even more so when there is the possibility of not being seen as experts or professionals. Therefore, concerns of being negatively perceived can greatly hinder participatory decision-making and innovative risk-taking.

### ***Costs of Turnover and Hiring***

The recruitment and retention of teachers involve multiple costs (Ingersoll et al., 2018). To hire Teacher Smith, the Blue Hill district had already invested monetary and other organizational resources (i.e., time and human resources) for advertisement, recruitment, and mentorships. Although replacing Teacher Smith could potentially bring an opportunity to increase instructional quality by hiring a “better

performing” teacher, the initial costs of hiring cannot be recompensated (Sorensen & Ladd, 2018). Furthermore, Principal Johnson was concerned about difficulties in recruiting a qualified science teacher as a result of replacing Teacher Smith. Sorensen and Ladd (2018) confirmed this concern by suggesting that geographically isolated schools are more likely to depend on teachers with lateral entry or provisional licenses in response to teacher turnover than other schools. This results in negative impacts on student achievement.

Kini and Podolsky (2016) also pointed out that years of teaching experience are positively associated with student learning outcomes. Research has shown that, for the first several years in teaching, teachers develop their effectiveness significantly in supporting student achievement as they gain additional experience (Henry et al., 2012; Kane et al., 2006). Principal Johnson noted that Teacher Smith’s professional progress as a teacher was promising, and the school leader could expect to see growth in the following years. Therefore, replacing Smith entailed costs of mentoring and support that would be compounded by two years of growth. Principal Johnson had to consider these underlying costs behind teacher replacement and consequences that could result from his decision.

### ***Ethical Paradigms of Decision-Making***

Under the pressure of high-stakes accountability, personal ethics are closely involved in individual leaders’ day-to-day decision-making (Kim, 2020). In this vein, some scholars in educational administration have developed inquiries about values, morals, and ethics in relation to leadership (Begley, 2001; Hodgkinson, 1991; Starratt, 1994) by agreeing that “values constitute the essential problem of leadership” (Hodgkinson, 1991, p. 11). To reflect on this case, multiple paradigms of ethics presented by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) offer theoretical grounds to explore multi-dimensional aspects of values that guide leadership decisions: ethics of justice, ethics of critique, ethics of care, and ethics of professions.

First, *ethics of justice* that covers the oldest philosophical theories focuses on rights, law, and democracy, and concepts such as equality, fairness, and freedom (Cherkowski et al., 2015; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). According to Starratt (1994), the ethics of justice is rooted in



two philosophical traditions: principled ethics and consequential ethics. The former framework concerns universal principles arguing that the intent of one's actions is more important than the outcome of one's actions; therefore, predetermined rules are essential when judging whether the decisions made are right or not (Wood & Hilton, 2012). In contrast, a consequential framework, such as utilitarianism, focuses more on the outcomes of decision-making when judging whether or not the action is morally right. While these two viewpoints rely on different assumptions, they relate questions regarding laws and abstract concepts of fairness, equity, and justice (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016).

The second ethics paradigm is *critique*. Influenced and developed by critical scholars who do not agree with the rational approach of the justice paradigm (e.g., Foucault, 1983; Giroux, 1994), the ethics of critique questions the policies and laws themselves. As well, critique calls into question the processes to justify the law and the constructs of legitimacy surrounding the social arrangements on which the law or policy is predicated (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). The ethics of critique is aimed at awakening educators to inequalities regarding issues about social class, gender, race, and power dynamics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016); leaders are expected to consider more from the voices of those who are silenced, disadvantaged, and underrepresented (Giroux, 1994).

Third, *ethics of care* centers relationship in making moral decisions (Noddings, 2013; Rucinski & Bauch, 2006). For example, Noddings, (1992, 2013) argued that care should be primary in schools by suggesting that "the first job of the schools is to care for our children" (Noddings, 1992, p. xiv). Leadership studies have argued that building relationships and a caring culture are critical for successful school leaders (Louis & Murphy, 2017; Rucinski & Bauch, 2006). Thus, the ethics of care can explain how and why school leaders make decisions based on interpersonal relationships instead of following rules or standards.

The fourth paradigm, *ethics of profession*, takes into account the three paradigms stated above and concerns about the best interests of the student (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). This model investigates the conjunction of personal, individual, and professional codes of ethics with those of the community, and the standards of the profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). In this paradigm, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) articulated that school leaders are required to develop their



own personal and professional codes because formalized professional standards and codes may not have a significant influence on them. For example, Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) developed by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) can be a guideline for principals to follow.

### **Classroom Activities and Discussion Questions**

Class activities and questions around this case that instructors can use:

1. In groups of five to six, each member will be assigned to perform Principal Johnson's ethical dilemma. Each member will select a character: Principal Johnson, Teacher Wilson, Teacher Smith, Teacher Turner who supports Principal Sparrow, Teacher Dollins who loudly criticizes Principal Johnson (groups can create any character they want to play). In your performance, each group will act out how Principal Johnson makes decisions and how other teachers respond to it. With their permission, the performance can be videorecorded and used for later discussions.
  - After performing, invite each student to write a journal for five minutes to reflect on their experience in the performance. Students consider questions: what were your initial feelings? In your current role in the real world, how would you perceive your action in your performance? What are your responses to other groups' performance?
2. In pairs, students discuss the district's policy context and generate multiple options for Principal Johnson while evaluating risks and gains (i.e., school reputation, school-community relationships, costs of new hiring/mentoring, student achievement, school culture, and ethics) for each option.
3. In small groups, class will share options that they generated and come to a group decision and rationale for Principal Johnson's decision-making processes by creating a table, a graphic, or an idea tree on the board. Each group presents how and why they choose the group decision.
4. In a whole group discussion, applying multiple paradigms of ethics, class will analyze this case from different views of ethics. Students will discuss:

- Which ethics were applied in their individual and group decisions?
  - How each of ethics is related to policy forces shaping the teacher evaluation policy used by the district and the state?
5. Class will first reflect on the following questions individually, and then, in small groups, share their personal examples with other group members:
- What are important values or principles you want to keep in mind for these types of ethical dilemmas?
  - What “gray areas” made your leadership decisions difficult?
  - Create a list or a table that shows values and principles that individual learners think important in making their decisions and grounded ethics behind their thinking process and behaviors as educational leaders.
6. As a whole group discussion, class will reflect on why school principals often encounter dilemmas like the case and how they can use the paradigms of ethics in daily practices in the current policy environment. Class will revisit their recorded performance and journal writing (from activity 1). Students will add reflections and new ideas in their journal.



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## Note

1. Districts can choose whether or not to accept students who live in other districts within the same ISD and students who live in another ISD to enroll in school sharing a border with their district's ISD.

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